



A Glimpse Into the Past

During your visit to Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, you have the opportunity to take a glimpse into the past. Whether it is exploring red sandstone hills as you hike to Calico Tanks, or viewing the handprints painted on the side of a sandstone rock near Lost Creek, you will be taking a step back in time. Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area offers you both the opportunity to enjoy various forms of recreation on your public lands and to learn about the *odd, unique* and sometimes *mysterious* past in this part of the Mojave Desert.

In the past, Red Rock was completely arid, much like the Sahara Desert of Africa is today. From eastern Colorado to Nevada stretched an extensive sand dune field which was more than a half-mile deep in some places. Eventually, layer upon layer of sand was compressed and cemented into sandstone, known locally as *Aztec Sandstone*. During the sand dune development, *iron oxide* was responsible for turning some of the rock into a reddish brown color.

Underneath the young sandstone (possibly 180 million years old), were layers of even older rock (limestone) formed earlier by the presence of inland seas. About 65 million years ago, a fracture in the earth's crust resulted in the older limestone rock being thrust over the younger sandstone. Today as you explore the scenic loop, you see only a small portion of the sandstone rock, with much more of it still obscured by layers of limestone rock.

As you look closer at the sandstone found at Red Rock Canyon, you may notice that certain sections are covered by a black-bronze glaze known as *desert varnish*. These are the best places to look for petroglyphs drawn by Native Americans. Long before white settlers came to this area, the canyons of Red Rock were used and explored by Native Americans in search for plants, seeds and game. *Petroglyphs* were created by chipping or pecking into the varnish on the outside of the



Petroglyphs

sandstone. As you look at some of the petroglyph and *pictograph* (painting) sites around Lost Creek you may wonder what they mean. There is considerable debate about this. To some Native Americans, the triangular shaped figures in the picture above represent people. But there are a group of skeptical historians who have suggested that these ancient forms of art have no value or meaning at all.

As you explore Red Rock Canyon, take a little time to think about how this place has changed and how it will continue to evolve. Red Rock Canyon is not static, like a museum, but is a living and dynamic environment we are a part of. How we use places like Red Rock Canyon today will have a significant impact on the kind of place future generations will have to enjoy.

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Moonset Over Rainbow Mountain photographs by Brian Buttazoni